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ABSTRACT

The goal of this study was to develop theories about how novice teachers connect the process of reflectivity to their classroom management. The study focused on whether novice teachers connect their observations about situations which occur in case studies to their own experiences, whether they reflect before or after their actions, and whether they feel capable and/or empowered enough to cope with day-to-day discipline problems in the middle school classroom. Three middle school student teachers--all secondary science student teachers--nearing completion of their program of undergraduate study, were selected as study participants. Data were collected through face-to-face conversations with them, from their written responses to a case study depicting a second-year high school mathematics teacher with a classroom management problem, and from responses to a questionnaire. The participants responses to the case study indicated that they were reflecting on problems that teachers face; however, their written responses indicated a greater sense of reflectivity compared to what they displayed when discussing the problems they faced within the classroom each day. Participants reported that in the early stages of their placement their concerns were primarily content-oriented, while toward the end of their placement their concerns were about discipline and whether or not students were learning what they wanted them to learn, and they were more willing to change a lesson if they felt it was not effective. Gaining credibility was important to the participants, since they stated that being recognized as a "good teacher" and authority within the classroom was their most prized accomplishment of the internship. Overall, they recognized that trial and error is always necessary, even in the most experienced teacher's classroom. While the novice teachers reflected more as their internship progressed and gained more confidence in their ability to manage their classroom, they continued to voice concerns about the problems of increased violence within schools. (ND)

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Novice Teachers' Reflectivity Upon Their Classroom Management

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Theoretical and Research Background

The question of how and when novice teachers reflect upon their classroom management throughout their internship is a multi-faceted issue, since research has generally supported the notion that student teachers' concerns about discipline diminish as they gain experience and become more secure in the role of teacher (Fuller & Brown, 1975). However, as novice teachers enter today's schools which are plagued by the societal problems of the 1990's, reflection upon discipline will continue to be an issue throughout the student teaching internship as well as throughout one's professional career. Understandably, both nonchallenging and overly threatening student teaching placements are not as desirable as a placement that offers opportunities for problem solving through reflection-in-action (Gipe and Richards, 1992). The novice teachers who were participants in this study were placed in challenging school environments which offered them opportunities to reflect upon their methods of classroom management.

A background research of the literature was conducted to look at existing studies and data conducted on student teachers concerning classroom discipline, teacher attitudes, and reflectivity.

Initial Questions and Objectives

This study asks the following questions about novice teachers:

1. Do novice teachers connect their observations about situations which occur in the case studies to their own experiences?
2. Do novice teachers usually reflect before or after their actions?

3. Do novice teachers feel capable and/or empowered enough to cope with day-to-day discipline problems within the middle school classroom?

The goal of this study is to develop theories about how novice teachers connect the process of reflectivity to their classroom management.

Method

Criteria for Selecting Participants and Setting

Three student teaching interns nearing completion of their program of undergraduate study, selected out of convenience, were selected as participants for this study. The interns met with the researchers three times over a period of six weeks. The meetings were at the beginning of Tuesday night classes for approximately one hour and fifteen minutes (5:00 p. m. until 6:15 p. m.). The students were all secondary science student teachers at middle schools.

Data Collection and Researcher Roles

Two mentor teachers conversed with the student teachers during prearranged meetings at The University of Alabama. These meetings were structured to facilitate discussion about the novice's successes, failures, and areas of concern among the participants and the mentor teachers in an informal setting. The data include (a) notes of face-to-face conversations with the novice teachers; (b) the novice teachers' written responses to a case study depicting a classroom management problem; and (c) the novice teachers' responses to a questionnaire.

The researchers roles as participant observers involved three meetings with

the student teachers for 1 hour and 15 minutes over a period of six weeks. Meetings were conducted in a classroom in which three other student teacher-researcher groups were meeting. Each group was seated at their own round table, and snacks were provided at each meeting for all of the groups. During the meetings the researchers probed the student teachers to encourage them to share their classroom teaching experiences by discussing (a) their written responses to discussion questions based upon a case study, (b) what the novice teachers perceived to be the most pressing issue in education, and (c) what they viewed as their greatest accomplishment while student teaching.

During the conversations, the novice teachers were encouraged to recount what they were experiencing during their internship. As the novice teachers told about their experiences, they were asked probing questions that encouraged the novices to reflect upon their actions and decision making process.

The case study selected was Case 11 from *Case Studies for Teacher Decision Making* by Greenwood and Parkay. In the case Sam, a second year junior high mathematics teacher, is finding it difficult to motivate four of his students to do their work and behave properly in class. Sam talks with the students individually and has conferences with the parents, but his attempts to motivate them are unsuccessful. Ultimately, Sam becomes so frustrated with the students that he sends them to the principal's office. After reading the case, the novice teachers responded to five discussion questions which probed their perceptions of Sam's decision making process and the dynamics of interpersonal interactions within the classroom.

On the questionnaire, respondents were asked to rate each of ten concerns of

student teachers in descending order, with one being their greatest concern and ten being their area of least concern.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted collaboratively by researchers and the student teachers. Inductive analysis was used to examine journal interview notes, student teacher questionnaires, and case study questions. The analysis process led to the development of categories for organizing the data. This process was initiated by the researchers during the data collection period and was continued collaboratively by researchers and student teachers during the 6 week period. Concurrently, the researchers and participants generated assertions and tested their validity by seeking evidence from multiple data sources that confirmed or refuted them.

Results of Data Analysis and Emergent Patterns

The first research question focused on whether or not novice teachers connect their observations about situations depicted in the case studies to their own experiences. In the second discussion session, the novice teachers stated that the case studies made problems and solutions easier to see because they were removed somewhat from a real classroom context in which "the flurry of activities makes problems more difficult to isolate and solve".

The novices' written responses to questions about a case study involving a teacher who is having difficulty motivating several students to bring materials to class and complete their assignments ranged from "Relax a little. . . don't let the

students know how much it bothers (you)," to "Yes, Sam should have sent the students to the office because he had tried to work with the boys and thought the principal might be able to get through to them. He also had to consider the other students." The novice teachers suggested other interventions such as: "Have extra materials available for use. Maybe leave the students to do their unfinished assignments by giving them the materials and separating them to discourage misbehavior"; "Try appealing to the students' interests. Strike a bargain"; and "Give tutorial time to the students to try to accomplish some work during a supervised period."

Clearly, the novice teachers' responses to the case studies indicate that they are reflecting on problems that teachers face; however, their written responses to the case studies indicate an increased sense of relectivity compared to what they display when they discuss the problems they face within the classroom each day. The literature supports the notion that teachers are able to focus on their students and the students' learning processes only after they have reached a stage in their own professional growth in which they develop an image of themselves as the teacher and authority figure within the classroom (Martin and Baldwin, 1993).

The second research question concerned whether most of the novice teachers' reflectivity occurred before or after their actions. Many researchers have studied the developmental patterns of student teachers' concerns, noting that they pass through a stage of self-survival concern, a stage of teacher or task concerns, and finally become more student oriented (Guillaume & Rudney, 1992; Gipe & Richards 1992; Wedman, Martin & Mahlios, 1990; Alexander, Muir, & Chant, 1992).

In the final group discussion session, the researchers probed the student teachers' perceptions of their changing concerns and the development of their reflectivity by asking them how their concerns about teaching changed from the beginning of their placement to the end. All of the interns stated that, prior to their student teaching placement and during the early stages of their placement, their concerns were primarily content-oriented: they worried about planning lessons and that their students would ask them a question they were unprepared to answer. They said that towards the end of their placement their concerns were about discipline and whether or not the students were learning what they wanted them to learn.

According to Alexander, Muir, and Chant (1992), effective teaching requires the teacher to accurately perceive what is taking place within his or her classroom and to truthfully interpret what he or she is perceiving. Many researchers view reflection-in-action as a way to improve teaching practice within the classroom. Dewey and Schön explain reflection-in-action as the process of looking back over what was done and using that information as a means of shaping and improving future action (Guillaume & Rudney, 1993). All of the novice teachers related that change was more difficult when they first begin their placement; they would usually keep teaching a lesson as they had originally planned it even when it proved unsuccessful with the students. However, all of the novice teachers said that during the course of their placement they became more willing to make major changes with a lesson within the course of a day if it was not working, or often they would modify the lesson as it was being taught when they thought that a change would

result in greater success with the students. Peggy said at this point in her experience, "Change is natural", and Brandy and Heather said that they are "constantly reflecting" and "reflecting has become automatic." These responses are supported by Schön's contention that "reflection on action hinges on the element of surprise" (Guillaume & Rudney, 1993). "Changes in lesson evaluations, then, illustrate student teachers' growth toward competence and independence since they apparently began to expect that their teaching would go well" (Guillaume & Rudney, 1993).

The third research question dealt with the novice teachers' sense of their own capability and empowerment to handle day-to-day discipline problems within the middle school classroom. Clearly, discipline problems in a middle school setting differ from those found in other settings because young adolescents are plagued by the confusing changes that confront them as a result of puberty. Further, the high energy level of middle school students can result in unruly behavior.

In response to the question, what do you believe to be the biggest problem facing education today? all of the novice teachers' responses related to at-risk students and discipline. A year-long study conducted by Guillaume and Rudney (1993) supports the novice teachers' concerns about discipline. Concerns about discipline do not diminish; rather, they remain an important concern throughout the internship (Guillaume & Rudney, 1993). Primarily, the student teachers' concerns focused on receiving necessary administrative support in situations when a student's unruly classroom behavior, or a child's persistent incorrigible behavior, necessitated taking the problem to a higher authority. Peggy stated that "going to the office should be a bad consequence". The novice teachers reported a problem with sending

students to the office because they felt the consequences were lacking in severity.

When the novice teachers were asked to name the class which had best prepared them for student teaching, they cited a course in educational psychology. Research conducted by Kohut and Range (1986) supports the idea that "prospective teachers (need to) be better prepared in the psychology of the classroom and in dealing with emotional and disruptive behavioral problems". Heather and Peggy voiced concerns about the teacher's responsibility to meet the needs of students with diverse ability levels, as well as students who come from home situations deficient in parental responsibility and nurturing. Research suggests that often beginning teachers view student misbehavior as directed toward them, but when they are able to realize that misbehavior is often related to the teacher's role or to factors outside of the school environment, they will be in a better position to handle the situation (Kohut & Range, 1986).

Conclusions

Novice Teachers' Reflectivity Upon Their Classroom Management

This study was conducted during the novice teachers' final weeks of student teaching, so by this time many of their concerns about being recognized as an authority within the classroom had been somewhat allayed. Gaining credibility was still important to them, since they stated that being recognized as a "good teacher" and authority within the classroom was their most prized accomplishment of the internship. Overall, they recognized that trial and error is always necessary, even in the most experienced teacher's classroom. While the novice teachers reflected more

as their internship progressed and gained more confidence in their ability to manage their classroom, they continued to voice concerns about the problems of increased violence within schools and the capability of teachers and school administrators to handle situations that would challenge experienced law enforcement agents.

Implications for Future Research

When the sample student teachers were first assigned to the researchers' mentoring group, the primary focus was upon how well the novices could use reflectivity to analyze selected case studies. However, as time progressed, the researchers' interests shifted to other capabilities of the student teachers such as: (1) their college preparation to handle classroom management and discipline problems, (2) their ability to reflect upon their own classroom experiences prior to instigating action, and (3) their major concerns during their classroom field experience.

The study results revealed that:

(1) Our sample novice teachers are marginally capable of connecting experiences within their own classrooms to those depicted in case studies. This lack of continuity could be attributed to the novice teachers' feeling of inadequacy to impact discipline within their cooperating teachers' classroom.

(2) The majority of reflectivity shown by the sample student teachers occurs after their actions within their classrooms. However, after an unsuccessful experience within the classroom, they are able to reflect upon their previous shortcomings and devise a more appropriate way to handle the situation the next time it occurs.

(3) Our sample novice teachers do not feel empowered to handle middle school

classroom management or discipline problems due to their perceptions of a lack of administrative support.

The implications for the research conducted during our sessions for our sample student teachers include (1) teaching student teachers to make better connections between the theory which they learn in their teacher preparation program and the actual application of that theory within their own classrooms; (2) using research data to integrate major student teaching concerns throughout their teacher preparation program in which they will be clearly addressed; and (3) making sure that student teachers have the necessary support systems (college supervisors, cooperating teachers, and school administrators) to guide them throughout their field experience.

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